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A NATIONAL POLICY in RELATION
to
PRIVATE PROPERTY TIMBER RESOURCES

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A NATIONAL POLICY IN RELATION TO
PRIVATE PROPERTY TIMBER RESOURCES.

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SUMMARY.

The writer points out the importance of the contribution made by Private Property forests to the Australian Timber Industry, offers reasons why much of this forest should be protected for future production and supports the view that Commonwealth assistance is needed in the National Interests to ensure that the important areas of private forest are not lost in the future.

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(1) There is no need to reiterate what has been said at many conferences that Australia is poorly endowed by nature with forest areas.

(2) Quoting some figures from the 'Statement on Forestry in Australia' prepared for the 1957 Seventh British Commonwealth Forestry Conference, we find that:

State and Communal forests
(Exploitable and potentially exploitable)
totalled 66,000 square miles.
Private Forests 28,000 square miles.

The output of Home Grown Industrial wood was given as -

From State owned forest	. 208 million cu.ft.
From Private forest 129 million cu.ft.

Total 337 million cu.ft.

(3) Although these figures were for 1955 and undoubtedly would not be of an accurate nature it is clear that some 30% of Australia's wood output comes from Private property

and an interesting point is that the 28,000 square miles of Private property forest is listed as non-permanent, except for a small area of 156 square miles - mostly soft-wood plantations. It follows therefore, that the annual cut from indigenous Private property forest is expected to disappear unless some constructive action is taken.

(4) K.M. Gray in Australian Forestry (No.1 of 1960), shows the position in N.S.W. to be similar to that of W.A. where private property is substantially contributing to the total log output.

(5) In W.A. about 25% of the total production comes from private property and although the State still has an exportable surplus, in future decades there will be no surplus of timber or other wood for industry and for this reason areas of private property forest cut over for mill logs but worthy of management for future production should, in the national interests be protected and managed.

(6) With the comparatively slow-growing eucalypts and the absence of a market for pulp and poles, the private owner finds it difficult at present to see that it would be economical for him to manage his forest after the first cutting of the prime trees for sawmilling, etc., and it is somewhat difficult to see how the small man can be encouraged to look after his forest, although there are indications that the larger owners, which are mostly sawmilling companies, are becoming aware of economic possibilities. Some Commonwealth assistance to private forest owners is considered overdue as it is beyond the finances of State Forest Departments.

(7) An important point to consider is that so long as royalties on Crown lands remain at a low figure, it is rather difficult to convince the private owner that there is any future in it for him, but as royalties rise to a much higher figure, as is already the case in many parts of

the Eastern States, it must become evident to the private owner that the value of his forest crop can be a very high one. Even at the low average figure in Western Australia of about 5d. per cubic foot true volume, there are still areas of Private Property which carried or still carry timber of a royalty value of £30. per acre including poles and cordwood and in years gone by huge areas were ringbarked, destroying this asset. The position is not so bad to-day as it was in the past, but there are still numerous examples of areas being bulldozed which carry timber of the potential royalty value of £10. per acre on mill logs and poles which are not immediately marketable; while sales, still being made, of crown land at a few shillings to £1. per acre often involve destruction of a potential forest crop of poles and fair size trees which could be thought of as being worth at least £10. per acre, within one decade or so.

(8) For some decades past, Foresters have been saying that the end of timber from Private Property is in sight, but there are many factors which modify this thought, some of which will be set down after a brief review of the somewhat scanty available information is given.

(9) The Timber Zone of W.A. covers 17 million acres of which some 8,200,000 acres is private property and of which private property some 1,000,000 acres fall into the category of 'Timber Reserved to the Crown', but most of this category will revert to the Title Holders in 1965.

(10) The Forest Inventory of W.A. is being developed at a rapid pace but naturally first attention is given to the mapping and assessing of areas of State Forest and Crown Land within the zone and accurate figures for Private Property will not be attempted until about 1961. Nevertheless some data of varying accuracy re Private Property does exist and gives at least a view of the question, sufficient to say that the private Eucalypt forests could continue to play an important part in the future.

(11) In 1953 a first estimate of marketable timber on Private Property not reserved was placed at about 150 million cu.ft., but this is now known to have been somewhat short of the true position. In fact, from 1953 to 1960, nearly 100 million cu.ft. of saw logs have been removed at a rate of over $12\frac{1}{2}$ million cu.ft. per annum and a rough estimate in 1960 indicates a volume of 50 million cu.ft. remaining. It is thought that the supply will last for at least another 4 or 5 years by which time the logs on 'Private Property reserved' will mostly become Private Property.

(12) Private property forest areas continue to provide timber long after they have first been noted as 'cut out', the reason for this being chiefly reduction in log standard and lengths which mills will accept from private property, when they will not necessarily accept such logs from Crown land, and the introduction of better handling methods including finger-jointing, match-end boards, etc., tends continuously to reduce the standard of log which they will accept from private property. This is more particularly the case as the royalties rise on Crown Land timber and the Private Property owner is prepared to let his timber go at a lower price, either to get his land cleared or to get a lump sum for his timber or if the sawmiller himself be the owner of the timber he looks upon it as being royalty free and will cut logs which he would not accept from State Forest.

(13) It is, therefore, extremely difficult to assess the future of timber on Private Property and it must not be overlooked that while a great many of our farms are cleared or part-cleared, there are still in most cases, scattered shade trees which the farmer will sell from time to time and which are, often due to greater spacing, growing at a better rate than forest trees. These trees alone could and already do provide a not inconsiderable quantity of timber annually.

(14) There are indications today that some metropolitan mills are prepared to take logs down to as short as 5' for use in case making and composite boards (finger jointed) and

if assessments allow for the marketing of logs this size, it may undoubtedly be assumed, that there are still large supplies, of such timber available on private property.

(15) In Western Australia, it is not considered that any precise inventory of private property timber is warranted at the present time, due to the many factors which would render it inaccurate, but it is expected that an improved estimate will be available by 1962.

As previously stated, approximately 25% of all logs milled is drawn from private property, and the writer sees no reason to doubt that this position will continue for many years, but will then come to a sudden cessation unless management is undertaken.

(16) There is one saving grace regarding private property Eucalypt forest in Australia and that is that much of it occurs on very poor land on which already, farming has collapsed, leaving the land to revert to nature and to the production of a new forest. Particularly in the South-West of Western Australia, it is now seen that to kill a forest and replace it by pasture is a very expensive procedure and time will probably show that much of this land will pay better dividends under forest on which little money is spent, rather than under poor pasture which can be established only at some £40. per acre in the vigorous forest areas.

(17) Within these high rainfall areas both in Western Australia and in the Eastern States, it is now being seen that the farmers most likely to succeed are those whose crops involve intensive culture with an annual working of the soil. The writer therefore predicts that in decades to come, a great many areas which are now considered to be farming lands, will revert either to private forestry or will be repurchased by the State for timber production. This view is not merely a futuristic thought for the process can be seen clearly in Western Australia where many thousands of acres of highly developed land settlement projects have already reverted to

stands of fine karri regrowth while in the wandoo forests of the Western and Northern areas of comparatively low rainfall, many properties are to be seen on which complete ringbarking has induced an attractive crop of the valuable wandoo tree, whose values encompass far more than sawn timber; they include high honey values, tannin direct from the log and the most durable pole and fence post to be found in small sizes of even 4' - 5" crowns.

(18) No doubt the Eastern States can quote many similar examples where with no forestry whatever, a new forest has developed and in a great many of these cases, protection and management of such forest is a very inexpensive procedure, particularly as fire protection within a district reaches a higher order of perfection and the main expenditure to bring forward many of our Eucalypt species would be merely careful planning, some roading and control burning. As has been pointed out earlier the private owner probably needs assistance in this work and it is beyond the capacity of State Forest Departments, which need the whole of their income to manage their own tenures. There is, therefore, a definite case for Commonwealth Grants to be made from Tariff revenue, probably through Forest Departments of the States for the purpose of protecting areas of private forest which the owner is prepared to keep as forest and to agree to leave uncleared for a stipulated period.

Such legislation is in force in England and Europe but has mostly failed through too much coercion and too little real help.

(19) Australia may learn from others failures and, if well considered, a simple formula could build a huge future asset with comparatively small financial outgoings - by the Commonwealth and the private owner.